

[Early Railroad Travel]

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BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS - FOLK TYPES

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Title Early railway travel and small town life

Place of origin Oreg Date 12/12/38.

Project worker Sara B. Wrenn

Project editor

Remarks [???

Form A

Library of Congress

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date December 12, 1938

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Early Railway Travel and Small Town Life.

Name and address of informant Mrs. Hortense Watkins 2493 SW Arden Road, Portland Oregon.

Date and time of interview December 8, 1938

Place of interview Home, above address.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant —

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you none.

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Comfortable home with attractive surroundings in high-class residential district.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Library of Congress

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Name and address of informant Mrs. Hortense Watkins 2493 SW Arden Road, Portland, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates
6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities
9. Description of informant
10. Other points gained in interview

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1. English-Scotch-Irish.
2. Erie, Pennsylvania. December 4, 1851.
3. Father, John McCarter; Mother, Katherine Sherrett.
4. Pennsylvania, Kansas, California, Oregon since 1883.
5. Country public school; Young Ladies' Seminary.
6. Housewife, with much cooking.
7. Needlework.
8. No religious affiliations. No reason apparent for denominational faith. Always tried to follow the Golden Rule. Children grew up as Episcopalians.
9. Tall, dark and "genteel", of the mid-Victorian type.
10. Mrs. Watkins is a woman who has devoted herself always to her family. A widow for many years, she lives with a married daughter and her life is centered now in her grandchildren.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

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Name and address of informant Mrs. Hortense Watkins 2493 SW Arden Road, Portland, Oregon.

Text:

I am hardly what you would call a pioneer, since it was only as far back as 1883 that I came to Oregon, and not in a covered wagon. But even the way I came with my four children is something of a day that is no more. We came from Kansas to Oregon by way of California, in what was known as a family tourist coach. It took ten days at that time from Kansas to California. I have forgotten just what the railway fare was, but I do remember that children under twelve were half fare, and in some manner I had an extra half. So when a fellow passenger who had six children and not tickets enough to go around found herself in a quandary after boarding the train, I took the surplus youngster on with my extra half. Every time we had a new conductor he would say something about how little that child resembled the rest of my brood, for he was tow-headed and all of mine were dark. We had quite a time, but finally got through all right, and I breathed a sigh of relief when the poor woman and all her six reached their destination.

Those tourist cars weren't very pleasant traveling, but I guess they were a lot better than six mouths of oxen and wagon at that. We had to furnish our own bedding, even the mattresses, which were made of ticking filled with straw, so they could be thrown away at the end. We had to furnish our own food too.

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There was a stove in the corner of one end, where we women cooked. I have forgotten just how many were in the car, but I do remember there were sixteen children, so you can imagine the hubbub. This sounds like an old fashioned funny story, but it's true. That train went so slowly in places that once when one of the men had his hat blow off, he jumped off, caught his hat and got on the train again without stopping. There were two old men that I cooked for. One of them, who wore a tall, silk, stovepipe hat, had his overcoat stolen just before he got on the train, so I loaned him a shawl, which he wore all the time. We had our own brooms, with which we had to sweep the car too. I don't think Heaven can look more beautiful to me than Southern California, when we finally got there. We were there just a few weeks and then came up to Eugene, which then had a population of about 2,000.

The only building of the Oregon University in 1883 was Deady Hall. Villard Hall was then under construction, if I recollect. My husband, who was a lawyer, had come to the Coast ahead of me. Later my mother, who was known all over the country subsequently as 'Grandma Munra', through her operation of famous Oregon Railway & Navigation eating houses, the first one at Bonneville and the last one at Meacham, up in the Blue Mountains. After mother joined me we took charge of the old St. Charles Hotel at Eugene, a two-story, wooden, rambling affair, with a veranda all around two sides. There were chairs on the veranda in the summer time and the hotel guests would line up out there, especially the traveling men. Down in front were watering troughs and hitching rails, where the country people tied their horses when they came to town.

We entertained Bob Ingersoll, his wife and two daughters, on one of his lecturing trips through the country. They were all charming people. It rained all the time they were here, and he worried a lot, fearing no one would come to his lecture because of the rain. I told him rain made no difference to people in 3 Oregon. His hall was crowded. Henry Villard stopped there too. Another person who used to come often was a well-known circuit rider

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by the name of I. D. Driver. He was unlucky with his wives. They all died. I think he had six in all. He always spoke of the latest deceased as 'my angel wife.'

When I first came to Oregon we seemed to have just two big holidays, Christmas and Fourth of July. I believe there was more excitement at our house on the Fourth than at Christmas, because one and sometimes two of my daughters rode on the liberty car, and there was an uproar for days before. Liberty cars are something we don't hear anything of nowadays, but they were mighty pretty. And instead of queens and princesses as they have for everything today, there was Columbia. She sat up on top of the [liberty?] car, and all the little States were grouped in tiers about her, each little girl in white, with a big sash down over her shoulder, showing the name of the State she represented. Columbia always had to have fair or golden hair. It didn't matter so much about the States, only they had to be pretty. The car was a big dray, all painted and draped with bunting and decorated with flowers and greens, with the seats arranged in rows one above the other. The car was drawn by four white horses, with lots of tassels and netting to set them off. The [liberty?] car was the most important part of the parade, but the "plug uglies" — young blades about town all rigged out in masks and fantastic costumes — excited a lot of interest. Everybody guessing who they were. Once in a while they would get a little hoodlumish. I think that is why they were eventually ruled out. Anyway we mothers were always rather relieved when the parade was over and our little States returned safely to us. There was always the fear of a runaway, what with the firecrackers and everything to scare a horse. We usually had some dignitary from elsewhere to deliver the oration, and at night everybody turned out to see the fireworks — Roman candles and set pieces like the flag, George Washington, etc.

Those were great days all right. I think everybody was happier then.

Form D

Extra Comment

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Subject Early Railway Travel and Small Town Life.

Name and address of informant Mrs. Hortense Watkins, 2493 SW Arden Road, Portland, Oregon.

Comment:

Though not in what is generally regarded as Oregon pioneer days, Mrs. Watkins' recital of certain phases of life in Oregon of over 50 years ago seemed well worth while to the worker, since they relate to people, conditions and customs that are matters of the past.